

Human Flourishing and Individuality

- The Montara Oil Spill

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Introduction

The news of BP deep water spill is still fresh in the memories of the people. The deep water oil spill happened in the Gulf of Mexico. However, a more serious incident also happened in Australia, where the leakage happened for 74 days before the same was controlled. The incident was not as popular as the BP leakage and the response of the media for the incident was muted (AMSA, 2010). The research takes into account the background of the case and the justification for the common good. The role of the stakeholders will also be checked and taken into account. The other issue has been the role of stakeholders. The assignment will take into consideration the resolutions in terms of the Environment, Australian Government perspective, religious aspects, and the benefits.

Background of the Case

The incident took place on Friday 21 August 2009, and was noted in the West Australia drilling rigs. This happened in the Montara Well where the Oil release was noted. The project has been owned and under operation by PTTEPAA when the incident occurred. This is a Thailand based company under the name, PTTEP. The spillage was 57 nautical miles from the important Cartier Marine reserve. It was also in a close reach of 80 nautical miles from another reef reserve in Ashmore. The problem of Oil spill occurred from the fire that took place in the Well head of Montara (AMSA, 2010). The incidence is significant due to the fact that the Oil spill continued for a period of 74 days before the same was intervened by mud in November 2009. The estimates from the Thailand Company were that 30000 barrels were spilled in the sea due to the crisis. It was observed that the flow would have been in the region of 1000-1500 in the initial stages while the same might have come down to 400 barrels in a day (AMSA, 2010). Apart from the flow there were spillage of Gas and other condensates.

Stakeholders and Perspectives

After the oil spill the response plan of Australia Maritime Safety Authority (AMSA), and an inquiry for the same was set up. There were several surveillance flights that were conducted so that the root cause of the spill can be gathered. This included the surveillance done by 130 flights that gathered the oil spill data, the information in regards to the problems of the environment was gathered by the flights. The sprays were made from these flights so that the oil spillage can be controlled. Meanwhile calls of independent investigations of the leakage came from Australia Lawyers Alliance apart from some other agencies. The claims have come from the fisherman and the people involved in the fishing business that they suffered massive losses after the oil spill occurred. Studies done on the subject claim that even after the spill has been controlled it is still affecting the coastal communities more than one and half billion Australian dollars per year. A multitude of parties have been affected by the fall outs of the Montara Oil Spill. Such groups who have a direct interest in the causes and the aftermath of the oil spill or the stakeholders, are bound to have varying perceptions of the fundamentals of the issue. This section explains the perspectives of the three major stakeholders in the oil spill towards it – the oil company, the Australian government, and the people of West Timor.

The Oil Company

PTTEP, the oil company responsible for the Montara oil spill, reacted strongly and responsibly to the incident in order to compensate for the damages to the various stakeholders as well as the restore their goodwill. Their initial emergency response comprised of all the 69 people at the West Atlas rig being rescued and transported to Darwin. Additionally, PTTEP did not deny its role in the spill and acted ethically by accepting complete responsibility for the incident. Further, it revolutionized its organizational culture, safety measures and

operational patterns under the Montara Action Plan, which was co-created by the company in association with the Federal Government (which also agreed to monitor the implementation of the plan) (PTTEP, 2014).

While its immediate attention was primarily directed to resolving issues of shared interests, it soon initiated endeavors to address the competing interests as well. From a long term perspective, PTTEP initiated and funded several environmental research and supervision programme to ensure that the biodiversity of the area does not suffer prolonged damage. Also, their efforts at overhauling the company reaped positive outcomes. The organization was rejuvenated and brought on the right track by updating and prioritizing functions such as safety, security, health and environment, now under direct CEO supervision. Also, newer and safer drilling management systems and teams were developed (PTTEP, 2014). The company also duly paid the \$510000 fine as charged by the Darwin Magistrates Court for negligent oilfield practices. When the deed that bound the Federal Government to monitor the company ended, it was independently reviewed and audited with favorable responses that appreciated its progression into safer systems at work.

However, the company's most significant response to the oil spill was the establishment of the Timor Sea Environmental Research, an international level independent body entrusted with the task of carrying out scientific research on the marine eco systems in the Timor Sea. Consequentially, an exhaustive database of the flora and fauna that thrives in the sea as well as extensive information about habitats and adaptability have resulted (PTTEP, 2014).

Through these multipronged responses, the company ensured that the interests of the powerful as well as the local communities are being addressed to facilitate common good and justice for all stakeholders.

The Australian Government

The Australian government was affected by the spill in two ways. Firstly, the biodiversity and life patterns of its own citizens was threatened by the incident, and hence it was required to act in its role of a regulatory authority (Lendon, 2009). Secondly, the spill also affected Indonesian fishermen, waters and biodiversity and called for action and intervention by the government in its diplomatic capacity. Its immediate response was notifying Indonesia instantly after satellite proof had been obtained. It also partnered with PTTEP to conduct clean up operations using dispersants, booms and skimmers. From a long term perspective, it started to closely observe and monitor the movement of oil patches and initiated the prevention of such spread through daily rescue programs (Lendon, 2009). Additionally, the government transported a jack up drill rig from Batam, Indonesia and placed it near high leakage areas to drill a relief well into the seabed that can absorb the leakage. Finally, it has regulated and monitored the activities of the company in fulfillment of its commitment towards the mitigation of the oil spill's aftermath (Australian Government, 2013).

The People of West Timor

Despite its efforts, the Government has been criticized for a lack of attention to the smaller and less influential parties affected by the oil spill. According to the Australian Lawyers Alliance (2013), the government has not sufficiently compensated or considered the welfare of the people of West Timor and excluded them from being beneficiaries of its response programs. It is believed that in its efforts to sideline public and diplomatic criticism on environmental and international grounds, it has failed to address local problems faced by marine-dependent communities in West Timor. The effects of the oil pollution have resulted in a death toll of 18 in economically backward fishing villages and also ruined their primary source of income (AMSA, 2010). Further, the government has been criticized internationally for not having dispatched any officials to personally visit the Indonesian villages affected (Australian Lawyers Alliance, 2013).

From the above analysis, it is clear that in terms of ethical standards, the Australian government has largely failed, especially considering its role of dual responsibility at the national as well as international level. No efforts have been undertaken to ensure greater protection in the future. Besides, the negative consequences of the spill have not been addressed meticulously (Australian Lawyers Alliance, 2013). Finally, the situation of the people in West Timor has remained largely sidelined in the entire response program.

Principles of Human Flourishing

The principles of human flourishing as provided by the Catholic Society of Teaching, aim to promote the idea that every person is worthy of having adequate access to societal resources in order to be able to live fulfilling and dignified lives (Caritas Australia, 2014). This encapsulates the essence of 'common good'. When the rights of an individual to personal wealth and access to a variety of other resources are balanced equitably with the needs of the deprived sections of the society, common good is attained.

The response to Montara oil spill clearly violated the principle of subsidiarity and participation. This principle requires a democratic and direct decision making process whereby the people affected by an issue are given the control to change it. In the case of the spill, the primary affected populations were the fishermen of West Timor, who had little say in the matter and consequently suffered neglect (Mustoe, 2009). Secondly, the principle of solidarity was violated as well. The Australian government acted swiftly to clean its image as well as the waters. However, it did not substantially address the practical and economic problems faced by the fishermen of West Timor. This can be attributed to a lack of compassion for people belonging to another nation and a different social strata of living.

Additionally, the third principle of having a preferential option for the poor was completely violated. Neither the PTTEP, nor the Australian government undertook any direct and

compensatory measures for the most deprived stakeholder group affected by the spill – the economically backward fishermen of West Timor who relied on fishing in the Timor sea to make their livelihood. Their vulnerability was not taken into account or addressed. The principle of economic justice was violated in the response to the oil spill on similar grounds – a complete lack of measures such as substitute employments or monetary compensation for the affected fishermen.

The principle of ‘stewardship of creation’ was, however, adequately addressed by the response to the oil spill. The oil company as well as the Australian government, edged on by various national and international NGOs, strived to restore ecological balance and protect the marine biodiversity and habitat for environmental good (Towie, 2009). Finally, it can be said that the response to the oil spill failed to align with the last principle of ‘promotion of peace’.

Such peace can be possible only by “safeguarding of the goods, dignity and freedom of people” (Caritas Australia, 2014). In the case of the spill, not only were the primary and all-important resources of the West Timor people destroyed, but also, sufficient efforts or attention were not directed towards their restoration.

Common Good

Apart from the stakeholders described previously, the spill also affected other stakeholders and jeopardized their welfare. Considering the expansive scope and impact of this incident and the broad spectrum of people that were affected by it, and considering the contradictory interests of the different stakeholders, it becomes evident that the Montara oil spill becomes an issue of common good and justice. From the analysis in the previous section, it is clear that the response to the issue failed to ensure human flourishing and common good, primarily through a continuous neglect of the economic fall outs of the spill with respect to the people of West Timor. Therefore, following a multi pronged strategy of 1) dispatching concerned

authorities to meet with the affected people and discuss their problems 2) coordinating with the Indonesian government to carry out compensatory efforts such as skill training, substitute livelihood provision, or monetary assistance 3) keeping a sustained vigil on the Timor sea and oil company activities to safeguard the future of these fishermen can promote the achievement of common good.

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